

The Athenian Mercury:

Resolving WEEKLY all the most

Nice and Curious Questions

Propos'd by the INGENIOUS.

Tuesday, March, 31st. 1690.

THose who are concerned in this Paper, hope it may be imputed to Modesty, rather than Weakness, that they are still forced to make further Explanations of their Design; they own it had been more cautiously expressed, if the Promise had been to endeavour the Answering of all lawful Questions, rather than absolutely performed it, tho' every Ingenious Reader will make such an Interpretation.—

We find the Questions grow so fast upon us, among which are several Duplicates with Complaints of their not being yet answered; that to obviate the Confusion which thence may follow, we intend to Publish our Paper twice a Week, viz. every Tuesday and Saturday. And in the mean time, till we are got clear of those already on our hands, we desire the Curious Inquirers to reserve their New Questions, till we shall give publick Advertisement that we have dispatcht all the Old ones, at least such as deserve an Answer.

Quest. 1. Why Mr. Smith the Coffee-Man in your Advertisement, and plain Matthew and Luke in your Quotations?

Ans. The first to comply with a Civil Custom, the last for the same reason, as some of the greatest Divines of the Established Church, do the same both in their Sermons and Writings, either through inadvertency, or because 'tis matter of so small Consequence, that 'tis hardly worth taking notice of; but however, rather than that should breed a Quarrel, or we be taken for Quakers, from our Aversion to any such slight Garniture, we'll take care for the future to mend the matter, and it shall be Holy St. Matthew, and Blessed St. Luke in our next Quotation.

Quest. 2. What causes the Ebbing and Flowing of the Sea?

Ans. Aristotle (if we may believe what Calias Rhodiginus says lib. 29. Antiquarum Lctionum Cap. 8.) died for Grief because he could not understand the reason of it, which he need not have done if he had asked himself this Question; What is the Reason of the Sun's Motion? Which is nothing else but the necessary Law of Creation, or the first Established Order of Nature. An Order, without which the whole Fabrick had revolved into its first Chaos, for had the Sun been fixt in any one Part of the Element, the opposite part of the Earth had been burnt up, and all the rest frozen, and consequently all the Terrestrial Globe incapacitated for fructification and Generation: In like manner, if the main Ocean had had no particular Commission or Order from its Creator (which is the only Efficient Cause) for a Flux and Reflux, it would have Stagnated and Corrupted, and by consequence unfit for Procreation of Fishes, and Navigation. If we be asked why the Mediterranean, West-Indian and Caspian Seas, and the Magellanick Streights have not their Tide? We answer, That The Mediterranean and West-Indian Seas, have their Motions, and empty themselves into one Sea, as they are filled by another; the Caspian Sea has its Motion, emptying it self through

Subterranean Passages into the Chinese or other Seas, as does our Canal in St. James's Park. The Magellanick runs with so great a rapidity into the Mare del Zur, That no Wind nor Art can force a ship up it, which Motion serves instead of a Flux, and Reflux, and diverts the Inconveniences aforesaid.

Quest. 3. What's the reason that some Men have no Beards?

Ans. A want of heat and a due disposition of Nature: So where there is not heat enough to open the Pores, for the Excrescency of Hair, that Humidity and Moisture which is the natural Cause of Hair, retires to other parts of the Body, more adapt and better prepared for Expulsion.

Quest. 5. Whence proceeds weeping and laughing for the same Cause?

Ans. 'Tis from an unequal Compressure of the Muscles, by the Passions; as for Instance, touch a place of your Body and it itches, rub the same place hard and it smarts: In like manner when the Passions act easily upon the Muscles, a smile ensues, if a little harder it causes laughter; if harder, it causes laughing and Crying at the same time; but if it be very violent, it causes only crying.

Quest. 6. Whether there be Witches? and what good Books have been written on that Subject?

Ans. I answer, there are Witches, unless we can suppose both God and Man would conspire to deceive us; the good Books written on that Subject, are the Holy Bible and the Histories of all Nations.

To be more explicate; by Witches we mean such as act beyond the ordinary Power of Nature, by the help of Wicked Spirits: The Proof whereof being matter of Fact, must rely wholly on the Credibility of the Evidence: God's Authority is unquestionable; Thou shalt not suffer a Witch to live; and such a Witch as the definition supposes, for such they were whom Saul destroyed according to this Law, one of whom was that at Endor, whose Story we have 1 Sam. 28. Saul desired her to Divine, and bring up whom he should name, that by the help of Wicked Spirits. By the Familiar Spirit, 'tis true the Websterians pretend the Words not well translated. The Word Ob which I think is here used, (for I haven't the Original by me) they tell us signifies only a sort of Bottle, or some such ridiculous thing in which the Conjuror mutters with a squeaking Voice to cheat those who come to him; at which rate all our Puppet-Players must be hanged for Conjurors; they must make God unjust to punish with Death a Cheat or Slight of Hand, or skill in Nature, whereinto they resolve all Witchcraft. Saul also and his Courtiers were the most stupid of Men, being so grossly imposed on, and all Mankind are Knaves or Fools, and they themselves only Wise and Honest.

As for Humane Testimony, this matter has all the Requisites of Credibility that any thing is capable of; 'tis affirmed by most Men, prudent Men, good Men, who had no Interest nor Temptation to impose on the World in a matter which depended not on nice speculation, but whereof they were competent Judges, in all Places, Countries and Ages, hardly any History e're written but giving some Instances, agreeing still in the main, both in Africa, Asia, Europe and America: To disbelieve it were to affront the Justice of our Fore-Fathers, and Wisdom of their Laws, who according to their Notion hanged up a Parcel of foolish Old Women, merely because they had cracked their Brains, and lost their Senses: In a word, a Man may as Modestly affirm, there is no such place as Rome, as no such thing as Witches; and when I see all this Answered let any other Objections be proposed.

For good Book on this Subject, I confess I think there are but few; I have named already the best Book in the World, and am ready to defend the Authorities thence deduced: But besides that, I shall recommend *Glanvil* till I see the matter of Fact on't answered; where *Mompesson's* Story, and that of the *Swedish Witches* would teach those People who deny any thing of that Nature, to blush if their Foreheads were not extremely hardened; Add to this the late Account from *New-England*; *Sheffers History of England*, would also be well worth the reading on this Subject, on which there will be shortly something very considerable made publick, which never yet appear'd to the World.

Quest. 7. Why Fish that live in Salt Water as Whittings, &c. taste fresh.

Ans. There is no reason they should taste otherwise, no more than that the Earth should be salt because of the Sea, or that our Loins should be salt by reason of Urine; The salt Water that passes through a whiting runs not through the whole Fish, but only the Guts. If it be objected, that water is its Nutriment, as is therefore dispers'd through the whole Body, and being of a salt quality, the Flesh should be so too; We answer, that there is already a sufficient natural Salt, not only in Whittings but in all other Animals, and therefore nature ejects all other accidental Superfluities, as Heterogeneous to it's very Being.

Quest. 9. Whether there is a Philosophers Stone?

Ans. If by a Philosophers Stone is meant an Elixir or Seed that engend'reth Gold, or turneth whatever it touches into Gold, I am satisfy'd there is none; Because the most learned Men that ever pretended such an enquiry could never yet give a Reason why such a thing should be, and I cannot think that worth disputing which wants a reason to uphold its very being.

Quest. 10. Who is the Author of the Last Query?

Ans. The design of this Paper is not amuzement but Satisfaction, but since the Gentlemen who sent it, is dispos'd to be Merry, we'll be so too; we might therefore put him off with telling him, If he does not know himself, we cannot help it, but will be civilier, and here assure him, that if he yet protests Ignorance in that Grand Question, we'll as soon as we hear from him again, endeavour his further satisfaction.

—There having been four ingenious Questions propos'd by a Person of great Worth since the last, tho they were not there insert'd among the rest, we shall here for his and the publick satisfaction, endeavour to give them their respective Answers.

Quest. 1. What Idea a Man can have in his mind of the Spiritual World, which he never saw?

Ans. There are other ways of receiving Ideas into the mind, besides the sense of Seeing. There are millions of Persons in England who never saw Rome, and yet I presume but very few of 'em who han't some Idea thereof, and that in some part true, or conformable to the Object, (tho not adequate and perfect,) which they might receive by the sense of Hearing or Reading, from such as have actually been there. This I think comes pretty near the present Question; What we have heard of Heaven, and it holds of the rest, from those who have been there present, (and so far Divine Authority reaches,) that is, I think sufficient for us to form Ideas thereof agreeable to truth, and capable of raising our Desires thither. Now it being once revealed, that there is such a thing as Heaven, and that even the Bodies of Good Men will be actually there after the Resurrection; we may thence subsume, that it must be a determin'd place; and the Circumstances thereof include all possible and suitable Happiness. And that's all the Notion I have of it.

Quest. Whether Separate Souls Retain their Individuation, or are all turn'd into one common Soul?

Ans. The question seems not clearly propos'd. None can think that all separated Souls should coalesce or mix, and be confounded with one another. For then the good and bad must be equally happy or miserable. I presume therefore the Gentleman intends principally, or at least distinctly, those of Good Men. And believe they still retain their Individuation. For otherwise, First, there could be no Degrees of Happiness amongst 'em. Secondly, *Enoch* and *Elias* were only injured by being taken out of the World, before they had a higher degree of Happiness than other good Men, as of Piety and Vertue; afterwards, granting this confusion, they would either have none at all, or no other than all the rest. Thirdly, Granting that Hypothesis, our Saviours Soul and the good Thiefs would have been all one, and after this Life he had not been with him, but him himself in Paradise; for his Soul was subject to all the Accidents of Humanity, except Sin. Fourthly, I can't see any Difference between a new Individuation both of Body and Soul at

the Resurrection, and a perfect new Creation; and then where are Rewards and Punishments? Fifthly, If Souls are not divisible, I can't see how they are Unible, (if we may be pardon'd for the word,) nor can find any notion for their Conjunction so as to be actually inseparable from each other; nor see any Reason for such a supposition, nor (with submission till I hear their Arguments,) why so many wise Men have so much troubled themselves about it. Sixthly, good and ill Angels and Spirits are actually individuated in the other World: This appears from the Scriptures, and experience of Apparitions.

Quest. 3. In what Condition is the Soul of an Infant as to its rational Faculties, and what sort of Thoughts of the things it sees and hears may it be supposed to have?

Ans. We generally say, That the Soul would act as well in an Infant as a Man were it not for the indispotion of the Organs, since it grows not as the Body doth, but is essentially perfect the very moment 'tis infused, into the Embrio. If this be true, as I believe, and can see no reason to the contrary, I think 'tis not possible to avoid this consequence; that what ever it receives not from the external Organs is in as great perfection both as to power and act in the Infancy of the Body, as in its vegete and perfect Manhood. Amongst which we must reckon affirmation and negation, and all the natural and first Principles which a Child shews it was Master of before, by consenting to 'em, as soon as ever intelligibly propos'd, or expressing it's understanding 'em as soon as by the advantage of speech tis capable of doing it. On the other side, as to those Ideas which proceed from Matter, the Thoughts which an Infants Soul has of 'em, must needs be very dilute and confused. The internal Organs are undoubtedly weak and inhabile, as we see the external are, which just as a thick Mist in the Air, or a Moisture on the Glasse of a Telescope hinder the Eye, tho of the most exquisite sight, from distinguishing distant Objects, dazzle and confound the Soul, which gropes, and as we may say, feels about like a Man in the dark for what is just before it; wanting besides Experience as to material Objects, which the more it has, the higher usually it afterwards increases in the Exercise of Prudence and Reason. Thus we may often see an Infant very intently observing whatever new thing is brought to it, thereby by degrees treasuring up in it's Memory new Notions and Images of things, and the more of these it has by comparing 'em together, it's thoughts are more clear every day than other.

Quest. 4. Whether the Substance of this Earth shall be destroyed, or only refined?

Ans. By destroyed, I suppose, is meant annihilated; which tho some deny can proceed from God who is the Author of Being, I doubt not but it may by accident, as Sin came into the World by his with-holding his influence; tho he can't be the Efficient Cause of either: In answer, if we are to interpret those Scriptures relating to this Case in a literal sense, (which way I'm inclined to in this and all other, when there's no necessity to the contrary,) 'tis plain, that the Earth shall not be destroyed or annihilated, because it shall only be burnt up, and every one knows that's no Annihilation. What then shall be performed by this burning? The Fire must be either still continued, and so be the place of the damned, or the Earth be only refined by it as Gold in the Fire; or quite transformed into little less than another Substance, or at least endued with very different Qualities, as Earth into Glass, either to be the Seat of the Blessed, or some New Creatures only known to God. This latter Hypothesis appears to me most probable, as well from Reason as Scripture: The latter having several Texts sounding very much that way. New Heavens and a New Earth; The Restoration (not destruction,) of all things, for which the whole Creation groans, and several others to the same purpose.

When we give notice, that we have answered what Letters we have already received, continue to send your Questions as directed in the first Gazette, viz. To be left at Mr. Smith's Coffee-house in Stocks-market. But pray pay the Postage, or they will not be taken in.

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We have again this Week received a very curious and critical Question that we have been by several Letters importuned to answer, but having not room here, we design to give a satisfactory Answer to it next Friday. As to the Objections which we promised to answer every three Weeks, (there being but few sent as yet,) we think it more proper to reserve the Answering of them till the conclusion of our first Volume; when will likewise be publish'd an Answer to several Questions (particularly to that, Whether a Horse, &c. mentioned in our last,) that we think not proper to take any notice of before.